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Final Report: The Production of Social Order in the Royal Navy

Mutiny is a high-risk form of collective action because when it is discovered, the penalty is often death by hanging. The dataset we have been collecting is unique in the study of such insurgencies for two reasons. (1) Whereas most other such studies examine only positive instances of insurgency (e.g. cases where an insurgency has already occurred), ours includes both positive and negative instances. (2) Whereas most other studies are forced to rely on collective data (numbers of people involved in insurgencies), ours is based on individual-level data. We have collected data on every single individual on every voyage in the Royal Navy (RN). These two features of the study will enable us to provide much stronger causal evidence about insurgency than has been available in previous studies. We also systematically assessed the transcripts of around 175 courts-martial relating to individual mutinies and the mass mutiny at the Nore. This provides us with unprecedented insight into the genesis and criminology of naval mutinies and the principal actors in their instigation, conduct, and suppression. There simply never was a comparable study of mutiny in history or the social sciences and it provides extraordinarily rich and compelling data.

Here are some of the things we've learned to this point:

- There are two fundamentally different forms of mutiny: *voice* mutinies, aiming to redress sailors' grievances, and *escape* mutinies, aiming is to take control of the ship and deliver it to the enemy for compensation. The causes of these different types of mutiny are distinct.
- Public *oaths*, backed up with the threat of sanctions, were the principal means that ringleaders used to gauge the support for prospective mutinies, and attain compliance from sailors once the officers had been removed from command.
- Far from raising the odds of mutiny, the presence of *Irishmen* (widely thought to have had revolutionary tendencies in this period) on RN ships actually decreased the prospects of mutiny.
- Each mutinous ship had three distinct parties: (1) the officers, who were loyal to the Admiralty, (2) the ringleaders, who were loyal to the mutiny, and (3) the majority of the crew who were opportunistic, and sided with whatever group held power at a given moment. The key power that the ringleaders exercised in attaining compliance with the mutiny was the *control of information* about the likely consequences of participation in the collective action. In the mass mutiny at the Nore in 1797, the Admiralty offered amnesty to all those on ships that defected from the mutiny. Those ships that kept information from the men about the offer of amnesty were the last to defect from the mutiny.
- There is no evidence that *social networks* (indicated by the proportion of sailors who had previously served with other seamen) had any effect on the men's commitment to mutiny.

When all the data are in, we expect to be able to test the overall causal model of mutiny that was presented in the proposal. Beyond that, we plan to write papers about the following issues:

- *Violence*. Why are some mutinies violent, when there are incentives for both officers and mutineers to minimize violence?
- *Punishment*. What accounts for variations in the rate of punishment in RN ships? Is there a systematic difference in punishment between mutinous and non-mutinous ships?
- What explains the varying *sentences* for individuals in courts martials? Is this variation due to

- o Ethnicity?
- o Whether individuals engaged in violence?
- o The role that individuals played in the mutiny (ringleraders vs. followers)?
- o What accounts for variation in *desertion* rates between ships?

The project could not be completed within the initial 3 year period and we were not able to obtain a no-cost extension from AFOSR. The quantitative part of the study is based on documents - including captain's and master's logs, muster books and courts martial proceedings -- in the UK National Archives, which have been photographed and sent to us on cds. These documents are written in longhand on parchment, and are extremely difficult to read because of ink deterioration and paper discoloration. Very few of the University of Washington students we approached to do the coding could manage to a decent job of it. As a result, coding the documents has been considerably more labor intensive and has taken much longer than we anticipated. Thus far, we've managed to code 225 of 277 ships' captains' and masters' logs - around 450 documents of about 50 pages each. We have also coded 234 of 277 ships' muster books -- 234 documents of about 20 pages each. Thus, we have made substantial progress on a herculean task but need the period through June to finish up.

The other major problem with our inability to secure a no-cost extension is that due to the coding problems detailed above, we have not been able to fulfill our commitment to pay our distinguished naval historian expert consultant at Oxford (NAM Rodger, at All Souls College.

The work discussed above cannot be completed until all the coding is finished. At this point, we have only completed coding for an analysis of the mass mutiny at the Nore, which involved 36 ships. We presented a paper, "The Fall of the 'Floating Republic': Solidarity and Defection in the Nore Mutiny of 1797" at a conference on maritime radicalism in Amsterdam last summer. That paper is currently being revised to submit to the *American Journal of Sociology*.